

Illinois Home Visiting Guidance for Breastfeeding During the COVID-19 Pandemic

This guidance was prepared by the Maternal Infant and Early Childhood Home Visiting (MIECHV) program and the Illinois Department of Human Services. It was last updated 5/6/2020.

This document is intended to provide home visitors with general information and guidance on breastfeeding during the COVID-19 pandemic. While the decision to start or continue breastfeeding is the family's decision and should be made in consultation with their healthcare providers, home visitors can play an important role in informing and reassuring families around the safety of breastfeeding during this time.¹

Much of the information in this document is based on several resources from the following sources:

[Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine](#)

[American Academy of Pediatrics](#)

[Centers for Disease Control](#)

[Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative](#)

[Illinois State Breastfeeding Task Force](#)

[World Health Organization](#)

[Additional resources are listed at the end of the document.](#)

Currently, only a few studies have been conducted on the transmission of COVID-19 from mother-to-child perinatally. These studies did not find the virus to be transmitted to babies through pregnancy or breastfeeding.²

Leading medical organizations continue to encourage breastfeeding for babies as the best source of nutrition and strong defense against many infectious diseases and morbidity throughout post-neonatal period, infancy, and childhood development. Breastmilk allows for the direct transfer of antibodies and other anti-infective factors to the baby and has long-lasting immunological impact.³

Meanwhile babies remain susceptible to person-to-person transmission of COVID-19. In the very few confirmed cases of infants with COVID-19, the babies experienced mild illness. Proper safety precautions including respiratory, hand, and breast hygiene can help minimize risk of transmission of the virus and allow families to choose or continue breastfeeding their babies.⁴

¹ Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

² Ibid

³ World Health Organization: [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected)

Centers for Disease Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>

⁴ Ibid

Breastfeeding During COVID-19 Pandemic

If the mother is well, exposed, or is a patient under investigation with mild symptoms, breastfeeding is a reasonable choice when done with proper precautions.⁵

For mothers with confirmed cases of COVID-19, the following medical organizations provide different sets of recommendations:

The **World Health Organization** encourages mothers and infants to “remain together and practice skin-to-skin contact, kangaroo mother care, and to remain together and to practice rooming-in throughout the day and night, especially immediately after birth during establishment of feeding, whether they or their infants have suspected, probable, or confirmed covid-19 virus infection.”⁶

The **American Academy of Pediatrics** suggests temporary separation to minimize risk of postnatal infection for newborn babies. Mothers can reunite with their babies once the mother is fever-free without use of medications for at least 72 hours, is improving in other symptoms of COVID-19, AND seven days have passed since symptoms first started.⁷

On deciding whether to breastfeed or not as well as when and how to start or continue, mothers with confirmed cases of COVID-19 should work closely with their family and healthcare providers in making the best decision for themselves, their babies, and their families.

Breastfeeding Guidelines for Mothers with Suspected or Confirmed Cases of COVID-19

The following breastfeeding guidelines are for mothers with suspected or confirmed cases of COVID-19 who choose to direct breastfeed or express breastmilk for their babies. These recommendations are also beneficial precautions to take for healthy mothers and babies during this time.⁸

Direct Breastfeeding

- Wash hands with soap and water prior to and after breastfeeding.
- Clean and disinfect breasts prior to and after breastfeeding.
- Put on a face mask prior to breastfeeding.

⁵ Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine: <https://www.bfmed.org/abm-statement-coronavirus>

⁶ World Health Organization: [https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-\(ncov\)-infection-is-suspected](https://www.who.int/publications-detail/clinical-management-of-severe-acute-respiratory-infection-when-novel-coronavirus-(ncov)-infection-is-suspected)

⁷ American Academy of Pediatrics:

<https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/COVID%2019%20Initial%20Newborn%20Guidance.pdf>

⁸ Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine: <https://www.bfmed.org/abm-statement-coronavirus>

American Academy of Pediatrics:

<https://downloads.aap.org/AAP/PDF/COVID%2019%20Initial%20Newborn%20Guidance.pdf>;

Centers for Diseases Control: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/need-extra-precautions/pregnancy-breastfeeding.html>; <https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/pdf/hygiene/breast-pump-fact-sheet-p.pdf>; and

Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative: https://ilpqc.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/ILPQC20Breast20Feeding20with20COVID-19_4.2020.pdf

- If in a hospital setting, put on a gown prior to breastfeeding.
- Routinely clean and disinfect any and all surfaces that the mother and infant have been in contact with.

Expressing Milk

Before use of breast pump the following are recommended:

- Wash hands with soap and water before touching any pump or bottle parts and before expressing breastmilk.
- Perform meticulous breast hygiene prior to and after breastfeeding.
- Put on a face mask prior to pumping and expressing breastmilk.
- Inspect and assemble clean pump kit.
- Clean pumping area and equipment including pump dials, power switch, and countertop with disinfectant wipes.

During feeding have someone who is healthy and well feed the expressed milk to the baby.

After use of breast pump the following are recommended:

- Clean pumping area and equipment including pump dials, power switch, and countertop with disinfectant wipes.
- Clean pump parts that came in contact with breast/breastmilk as soon as possible after pumping. Cleaning should be done in a dishwasher or wash basin designated solely for cleaning the pump kit and infant feeding items.
- Perform meticulous breast and hand hygiene.
- Routinely clean and disinfect surface that the mother and infant has been in contact with.

More detailed information on proper pump cleaning can be found at the following:

<https://www.cdc.gov/healthywater/hygiene/healthychildcare/infantfeeding/breastpump.html>

Additional Resources

Illinois Perinatal Quality Collaborative

- [COVID-19 webpage](#) - clearinghouse for the most up-to-date state and national resources, COVID-19 OB & Neonatal hospital policies, protocols, and resources
- [“If Your Doctors Suspect You Have Coronavirus \(COVID-19\)”](#) (Adapted by ILPQC with permissions 4/2020)
- [“Is It Safe to Provide Milk for my Baby if I Have, or Have Been Exposed to, COVID-19?”](#) (Adapted by ILPQC with permissions 4/2020)